

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alexander Melville Bell, Eliza Symonds Bell, 1867, with transcript

3rd-copy set Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to his parents.

Somersetshire College, Bath, Saturday, June — 1867. Dear Papa and Mama:

How slowly the time does seem to be going till I can be at home again. It always seems to go slowly when I wish the reverse.

I think it very strange that I have heard nothing yet from Jamie Kennedy. I enclose Doug. Cooke's answer.

May I ask Eric Anderson in place of Doug.

He was one of my Elgin "chums" and his mother was very, very kind both to Melly and me; and asked me to stay at her house when I next paid a visit to Elgin.

Eric's father died last November leaving (if I remember rightly) eleven children — the eldest of whom (Eric) is not yet nineteen.

You must think it very strange that I have not written oftener than I have done. But indeed I cannot — I have little spare time — and I haven't the spirit to do anything — far less write a cheering letter to you — and I don't want to pour out my gloomy feelings upon paper — but I must now write something or other. Really what am I to do with myself? Am I to treat my low spirits as a temporary mental affection, to be shaken off again when I come within the reach of a friend's voice — or am I to consider my Melancholy as the result of a disordered stomach or liver — and say to it — as Scrouge did to Marley — "You — may — be — an undigested bit of beef-steak"! and as a physical ailment treat it with Physic ?!!!! I incline, I must confess, to the latter supposition and intend taking plenty of Porter or Port-wine every day, as a kind of medicinal 2 course. I am recommended however by Mrs. P. to vary

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the plan by trying as well, a little Sal Volatile or else some steel-drops to take away those nasty headaches I have been suffering from lately.

In fact the only idea I can form of this past week is — one immense headache . But now I suppose I am wrong in saying anything about a headache — for you will be fidgetting and imagining all sorts of things. If you do — the consequence will be this — Every succeeding letter will be sure to say how well I am etc., etc., climate of Bath so congenial etc. — health and spirits never better — etc., etc.

But apart from this senseless scrawl — I must say I have been very wretched for a week past — in consequence of a severe sick-headache.

I intend making tomorrow really “ a day of rest .” Since this will not go off till Sunday I won't post it till tomorrow evening so that I may say how I feel.

I am glad to hear that Melly is writing so regularly.

He has a stock of good-spirits I wish I was possessed of. I hope he manages to post you a little now and then.

Nelly seems to be very happy about his engagement with Carrie Ottaway — and well he may be! He will now have a worthy object for which to work. And I hope and believe that Carrie will find his a good and loving husband. I only wish I were as fortunate as Nelly is !!!

And so poor Perd is dead. Little did he think poor doggie (if indeed he was capable of thinking) — when we took him up to see 3 Ted that he was so soon to follow his master. It is a lesson for wiser animals than he.

Of little consequence as a dog may seem, yet I do believe that you will miss Perd very much. There will be no after-dinner whistle now to be responded to by his well-known bark. I wonder how the poor fellow managed to get that hurt to his leg.

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Have you written to Mrs. MacMillan yet. I received a paper from her the other day. By the bye that reminds me to thank you for the Ladies' Journal. I have only one book to amuse myself with now and that is "Carlton Grange." I am in the middle of the first volume and am interested deeply already.

But I must now think of closing, for — hark! the clock outside proclaims —

"Tis now the 'witching time of Night."

And so with Love. Good-bye Your affectionate son, Aleck. Tuesday Evening.

Dear Papa and Mama: I feel decidedly the benefit of a rest — Headache vanished — Health capital — but appetite ALARMING (owing to a smart pull on the river before breakfast.

I am afraid I am terribly in your black-books now for not writing — I did not send this to the post on Sunday as I could not say I was much better. And having been obliged to keep my bed yesterday [???] towards dusk I fell asleep and remained beautifully unconscious that I should have finished, and sent off your note before 10 p. m. — till it was too late.

I suppose that you know my name has been on Bisson's books for the last two or three months. Yesterday I was regularly overwhelmed by a host of "Vacant Situations for Midsummer" — However I have written to thank him for his attention and to say that owing to the death of my brother it will be necessary for me to remain in London and that therefore he need only send me notices of Non-Resident Situations or Tutorships in London .

I had quite an adventure this evening — and you may thank if it this letter is not in time for the post. As I left 18 Bennett Street this evening for my bed-room in No. 21 I was attracted by the sweet strains of a super-excellent band of music — and I stood extranced for I don't know how long. But at last a most marvellous solo on the harp drew me irresistibly closer

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(the man really played as though he were inspired). And I watched curiously the modus operandi of the pedals which I did not understand.

At the end of the solo I took the opportunity of satisfying my curiosity by asking the man their use.

He was very polite and explained the whole thing to me — and in the middle of the next performance he even turned to me to make me observe the way in which he modulated from one key to another by means of the pedals.

5

I was thinking what a pity it was that such a respectably-dressed man — and evidently such a scientific musician should come to play on the streets — even although the band he was with was such that no one would ever dream of giving anything but silver. I say I was thinking this when the music stopped and as they were preparing to depart he turned suddenly to me with the query if I knew who he was .

Almost staggered I replied that I did not. He then asked me if I was familiar with the song of “Would I were a bird” I said “Yes — I think it's one of Stonewall Jackson's pieces — Isn't it.” He replied “Yes — and I am Stonewall Jackson .” And before I got over my surprise the band and he moved on!!!!

I see my letter is too late now. It can't go off till tomorrow night.

I should like to hear how Grandmama is. I haven't heard of her for a long time. She no doubt thinks me “a good-for-nothing boy” for not writing — and so I daresay I am. But if she could only manage to read my thoughts in lieu of a letter — I believe she would blame my Procrastination for my silence — and then have a little more patience with me.

Many thanks for your other letter which I have just received.

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I hope you are both enjoying perfect health.

When you go to Edinburgh could not you give Nelly a fortnight's holiday — by taking any pupils he might have .

He might run up to London and th e poor fellow would then be happy!!!

With fond love I am

6

Dear Papa and Mama, Your affectionate son, Aleck. P. S. Please remember me to Carrie, to Mrs. Ottaway and the Cathcarts. AGMB